

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 11, 2009

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 RHOB
Washington, D.C. 20003

The Honorable Joe Barton
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2322-A RHOB
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Chairman Waxman and Ranking Member Barton:

We write to respectfully request the Committee on Energy and Commerce hold an oversight hearing to investigate potential politicization of the U.S. Census Bureau. As duly elected Members of Congress representing diverse constituencies, we value the nonpartisan, professional and critical work that Census Bureau employees engage in to develop unbiased information about the American people and the economy. It is therefore paramount for Members and the constituents we represent to be assured that non-partisan census activity is carried out without undue political influence.

According to the Census Bureau's strategic plan, the Bureau's work serves a higher purpose than simply developing statistics; the information gathered "shapes important policy decisions that help improve the nation's social and economic conditions." We agree, and believe that promoting a non-partisan census-making process serves the interests of the American people well.

We were therefore alarmed to learn that senior White House officials are contemplating a plan to change the management and reporting structure of the Census Bureau. According to a February 5th *Congressional Quarterly* report, the future Census Bureau Director will have a "direct line to the White House," potentially allowing direct White House control of the Bureau's day-to-day operations outside of the traditional management structure of the Department of Commerce. We believe this change in management, if adopted, may jeopardize the important and non-partisan work product of a sensitive administrative agency, and potentially disrupt completion of a competent, reliable 2010 census.

President Obama's nomination of U.S. Senator Judd Gregg to lead the Department of Commerce represents a promising bipartisan choice that may help the American economy recover during troubling times. Yet the Administration's Census Bureau announcement indicates that a bipartisan opportunity may be thwarted by a partisan attempt to remove the potential Secretary's control of a critical Commerce agency. It is therefore appropriate for the Energy and Commerce Committee to exercise its oversight jurisdiction, and hold a hearing regarding this development at the most expedient time.

The American people deserve a non-partisan census in 2010, and we hope the Committee will ensure that goal comes to fruition by holding an oversight hearing on the Administration's potential plans to reduce the future Secretary of Commerce's authority over the agency.

Sincerely,

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